

A

CHRISTIAN MEMENTO,

WITH

OBSERVATIONS

ON

SOME OF THE PREVALENT AMUSEMENTS OF THE DAY.

“Weak is the excuse that is on custom built,
“The use of sinning lessens not the guilt.”



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A CHRISTIAN MEMENTO, &c.

THERE is a habit in which many are involved that cannot possibly confer any benefit on themselves or upon others, but is an evil example to children, and a grief to every seriously reflecting person who is obliged to witness it. On the public roads, in the streets of our cities, in private parties, among the guests at the convivial board, this practice often prevails to a very alarming and shocking degree. We mean the very frequent, irreverent and familiar use of the sacred and awful names of God, Lord, and Christ; especially the first of these; a name that comprehends all the divine attributes of that exalted Being, who fills heaven and earth with his presence, and whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain; who sways the sceptre of his majesty over unnumbered myriads of saints and angels. All the blessings, the benefits, the consolations and the privileges we enjoy, are derived from this Almighty Being, the Great First Cause, the Fountain of all good. Let us then bear in conscientious remembrance that it has pleased him to stamp an awful import upon his great and holy, "his glorious and fearful name;" that he has forbidden its being ever pronounced in a vain, useless, or irreverent manner; and has fixed guilt upon the heads of those who violate his commandment: "thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

Some persons seem to think, that *on religious subjects* they are at full liberty to use it with the greatest freedom; but it does not appear that such a liberty has been granted. Our Saviour himself set us a different example, and that too on the most solemn occasions: when he was instructing his disciples how they ought to pray, the prayer which he then delivered as a pattern to his followers and to the world was short and comprehensive; and it is well worthy of remark, that the holy name in question was not once pronounced, but the great incomprehensible Being was addressed by the endearing appellation of father—"Our Father which art in heaven."

Now if the *inspired* Apostles and immediate followers of Christ had set before them, as a pattern, a prayer wherein that awful Name was not used, how careful ought *we* to be, never to pronounce it in a vain and unnecessary manner. Our Lord also instructing his disciples in the great duty of prayer, uses this expression—"Hallowed be thy Name"—which means, *sacredly revered be thy name*. When we approach the Creator by *using his holy Name*, it ought ever to be with deep

reverence of soul; if otherwise, do we not take or use his name in vain? and if so, may not the complaint uttered against some of old, be applicable to us?—"they honour me with the lip and the tongue, but their hearts are far from me."

And if in our most solemn addresses to the Throne of Mercy we are instructed to use the awful Name with *caution* and *profound* reverence, how much more should we forbear to use it unnecessarily on ordinary occasions?

We are also instructed in holy writ to attach great reverence to the name of the blessed Redeemer and Saviour of the world: indeed how can it be otherwise, when we consider that God is in Christ and Christ in God. "I am," said he, "in the Father and the Father in me." "I and my Father are one." And again, "all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." The inspired apostle to the Gentile churches, in his second Epistle to Timothy, says, "let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity;" as though he had said, he who doth not depart from iniquity, is not worthy to pronounce that sacred name. We may often observe that those who make a high profession of Christianity, but whose minds are not sufficiently clothed with awful reverence before the sovereign Lord of the universe, make a much more familiar use of the sacred names than the humble disciples of the meek and lowly-minded Saviour. Doubtless "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose *Name is Holy*," is often *offended* by the very free use of that awful Name, introduced in a *light and unfeeling manner*, in common conversation, and that too amongst those denominated Christians, his dependent creatures. The commandment not to take his Holy Name *in vain*, implies more than the prohibition of its use in a profane manner: it forbids also our using it on any occasion where it cannot promote His honour and glory. It is said of Robert Boyle, that such was his reverence for the Divine Being, that he never would pronounce that name called by Moses a "*glorious and fearful Name*," without making an evident pause before the word escaped his lips. The Most High hath said, he will be jealous of his *holy Name*, as though he had said, I will not suffer it to be used but for the most solemn purposes.

We should do well to remember the supplicatory expressions of David, the royal psalmist of Israel, and to adopt them as our own—"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." If under the Mosaic dispensation, this reverent caution was required, surely we should not expect to find a less degree of it under the more exalted and sublime dispensation of the gospel of Christ.

From the instructive passages of Holy Scripture already quoted, it appears that even on religious subjects the high and holy Name may be too freely used, so as to diminish the reverence with which it should ever be pronounced and heard. It is by some, indeed by many amongst the well-disposed, too frequently repeated, as though they thought the frequent use of it would add weight and solemnity to the subject they are speaking upon; but such a habit tends to familiarize it to our ears, and may cause it to fall lightly from our lips on ordinary occasions.

Whatever disposition or frame of mind we speak in, has an influence upon those spoken to, and a natural tendency to promote the same. In proof of this, every day furnishes us with opportunities of observing that the language and tone of affection, excite affection; the language and tone of anger, excite anger. Thence it follows, that if the holy *names of God, Christ, &c.* were never to be pronounced but with becoming solemnity, it would hold out an impressive lesson of instruction to those around us, and especially to the rising generation. They would then never hear the *awful sentences*, "*God bless you!*" "*thank God!*" or the others, pronounced with a light and smiling countenance, or in a flow of cheerful and volatile conversation, which is now too frequently the case with tens of thousands who are denominated Christians. If children are accustomed to hear that sacred name freely used on frivolous occasions at home, how can it be expected they will contemplate, with religious awe, in their places of worship or in their moments of private retirement and reflection, that great and holy Being, before whom "all nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." The candid and considerate reader will not find any difficulty in perceiving the drift and intention of the preceding observations. He will understand the design to be that the *high and holy name* of that *great, eternal, incomprehensible Being*, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, in whose presence *angels veil their faces*, whose *throne is for ever and ever*—a name *almost too holy* for the sanctified on earth to pronounce, should ever be reserved for the *holiest* of purposes.

The Sacred names are also used by many in a manner that is still more abhorrent to the feelings of the religious mind. It is by an appeal to the High and Holy One, with dreadful imprecations on themselves, or to consign to endless perdition a fellow creature who perhaps has excited their unmerited displeasure. This is not only unwarrantable in a Christian, but inconsistent with his dignity as a rational being. Certainly no man of reflection would deliberately call down the

Divine vengeance upon his own head: and it is perfectly incompatible, with the Christian spirit to pray for the destruction of any one, even the most implacable enemy. The Christian remembers the assertion of the divine prerogative, "vengeance is mine, I will repay;" and instead of loading his enemy with curses, he desires that the Holy Spirit may illuminate his understanding, and convert him from his evil ways. Indeed how can that man ask for mercy of his Creator, who cherishes in himself the disposition to curse a fellow being.

We are not disposed to pollute these pages with examples of the shocking imprecations, which are used by some upon various occasions; instances are already too familiar to every one. Swearing puts a man, whatever be his station in society, upon a level with the lowest and most degraded characters; and however the practice may find patrons amongst some who would wish to be considered well-bred, and who may be so in many respects, it bears upon the very face of it, the indelible mark of vulgarity. We would appeal to the person, who seems to expect to strengthen his credit, by annexing to what he asserts, some of those common-place execrations, whether the use of them has not always a tendency to produce an opposite effect. So far from increasing his credibility, they will be likely to lessen it in the view of those to whom he is speaking, as they are oftener used to confirm a rash or doubtful saying, than the simple truth. The man who swears, seems to think his veracity doubted; and well may it be suspected, for how can we believe *he* will be true to man, who so daringly violates the commandment of his Maker.

The use of profane language is irrational, indecorous, and impious. It conveys no useful ideas, it is peculiarly grating and disgusting to the feelings of pious people, and is an open breach of the injunctions of our blessed Saviour. Let those who are in this sinful practice pause, and seriously reflect upon the pain which they inflict on others, and the injury that accrues to themselves, because "every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgment." Let them remember what they are doing; against whom their evil tongues are directed, and who is the object of their contempt and mockery. Let them ask themselves what they are to gain and what they do not lose by such a practice. They lose their reputation in the view of the wise and good; they sacrifice their peace of mind, and are destroying every rational hope of eternal life. They are rapidly becoming more and more corrupted, and with this deplorable character, are hastening to judgment.

It will be impossible to escape this day of awful judgment. How important is it then to forsake every thing that renders us obnoxious to the Divine displeasure. The gracious language is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, and he will abundantly pardon." Reader, mayst thou no longer slight such offers of Divine love and mercy. Hast thou not felt the strivings of his spirit secretly condemning thee for thy evil words and actions? Has he not been in thy conscience as a reprover, and a swift witness against thee, when thou hast profaned his holy name? This voice which speaketh in thy soul, is the Spirit of his Son, the Saviour of the world, whom he hath sent to bless thee, by redeeming thee out of all iniquity. Turn unto it—obey its manifestations, and it will instruct thee to walk before him in reverence and fear—it will lead thee into holiness of life, and purity in language and conversation.



OBSERVATIONS, &c.

To the gay and the idle, the useful occupations of life are insipid and irksome, while for want of some employment to engage their attention, time passes heavily away. To alleviate these feelings, many plans have been devised, which, under the delusive pretext of innocently filling up their vacant hours, are in fact the means of squandering this invaluable treasure. Amongst those which in this specious character impose upon the young and unwary, few are more lamentably successful, or more certainly pernicious in their tendency than Gaming. To say the least of this practice, even when pursued only for pleasure, and in private parties, it is a childish and irrational employment, which occasions a prodigal waste of time.

Locke, having been introduced by lord Shaftesbury to the duke of Buckingham and lord Halifax, these three noblemen, instead of conversing with the philosopher, as might naturally have been expected, on literary subjects, in a very short time sat down to cards. Locke, after looking on for some time, pulled out his pocket book, and began to write with great attention. One of the company observing this, took the liberty of asking him what he was writing. "My lord," says Locke, "I am endeavouring, as far as possible, to profit by my present situation; for having waited with impatience for the honour

of being in company with the greatest geniuses of the age, I thought I could do nothing better than to write down your conversation: and, indeed, I have set down the substance of what you have said for this hour or two." This well-timed ridicule had its desired effect, and these noblemen, fully sensible of its force, immediately quitted their play, and entered into a conversation more rational, and better suited to their characters.

"I think it very wonderful," says Addison, "to see persons of the best sense passing away a dozen hours together, in shuffling and dividing a pack of cards, with no other conversation but what is made of a few game-phrases, and no other ideas but those of black or red spots, ranged together in different figures."

There is, however, something so fascinating, both in the thing itself, and in the company and scenes which it leads into, that it is calculated to engage the affections in an immoderate degree. Hence we find, that those who addict themselves to this dangerous amusement, generally acquire for it a fondness amounting almost to infatuation. This infatuation, heightened by "the love of money, which is the root of all evil," and which is excited in a remarkable degree by this diversion, opens a wide door, and presents powerful incitements to the destructive habit of *gambing for money*; and thus, what was at first resorted to merely for amusement, may soon become the primary business of life. The example to young persons is exceedingly pernicious; for those who have been familiar with cards or other kinds of play at home, and have there witnessed their fascinating effects sanctioned by the example and approbation of their parents, will not easily be restrained from resorting to the public gaming table, which is almost always the scene of riot and *drunkenness*.

How many of those miserable beings who crowd our penitentiaries, and furnish the awful spectacles of public executions, date the commencement of their wicked and unhappy career at the period when they first sat down as partners at the gaming table. It has proved the irretrievable ruin of thousands, who betrayed by its allurements, have gone on from staking small sums, to larger adventures, until at last they have hazarded and lost their whole estates, and involved themselves and their innocent families in the most abject wretchedness. Oppressed by poverty and pinching want—stung with remorse at the recollection of the comforts they once possessed, and which their folly and madness have torn from them—deluded by the vain hope of some auspicious change, they resort to means more avowedly dishonest, to retrieve their circumstances, and furnish them with money

once more to "*try their luck*;" but again and again they are disappointed, till driven to desperation, they fly to drunkenness, debauchery, or self-murder, to drown the reproaches of a guilty conscience. Thus many an unoffending and helpless family, have been reduced to beggary, while none are really enriched by the practice; for we challenge its advocates to produce a solitary instance of the useful and proper application of wealth thus fraudulently obtained; on the other hand numerous examples are presented, where it has been lavished in the most debasing excesses. In consonance with these evils, it fosters the growth of all those fierce and malevolent passions which corrupt and degrade the human mind. Anger—deceit and dishonesty—intemperance and blasphemy—distressing anxiety of mind—neglect of business—abject poverty—theft and suicide, may be ranked amongst its dreadful consequences.

The pernicious consequences of play have been frequently described in the strongest terms, and illustrated by the most striking examples. Seldom however, have they been presented on so large a scale, as in the late account of the fate of *a great body of gamblers* at Hamburgh, which an intelligent spectator has published in a German gazette, as the result of his attentive examination, during a period of two years. Of *six hundred individuals*, who were in the habit of frequenting gaming-houses, he states that *nearly one half* not only lost considerable sums, but were finally stript of all means of subsistence, and ended their days by self-murder. Of the rest, not less than a hundred finished their career by becoming swindlers or robbers on the highway. The remnant of this unfortunate group perished; some by apoplexy; but the greater part by chagrin and despair. An awful instance, which recently occurred, was related to us by an eye witness:—A youth, under nineteen years of age, of the most respectable connexions, after having by gambling lost his estate, amounting to many thousands of dollars, and indulged in those excesses which usually attend it, rose up from the table—drew a pair of pistols from his pocket, and to drown the horror and anguish of his mind, deliberately put an end to his existence, by shooting himself through the head. Can any man, then, who is sensible of the awful responsibility which rests upon him as a parent, and as a disciple of Christ, countenance an evil so enormous and so dreadful in its effects, even by permitting its introduction into his family as an amusement or pastime? Or can an employment which produces such painful excitement and wild disorder in the passions, and so wholly absorbs the attention, deserve the name of relaxation or entertainment? Did we diligently discharge our social and re-

ligious duties, and conscientiously fill up our stations in the world, we should be so occupied in following the example of our Divine Master, who "went about doing good to all," that we should find no time to prostitute to such baneful purposes.

Dancing is another entertainment, not only incompatible with our religious duties, but inimical to the preservation of good morals. It is however considered by many a genteel accomplishment; and as custom has made it the favourite amusement of fashionable people, its pernicious consequences have been too little suspected.

It would be wise in parents to consider, whether in teaching their children this art, they are not encouraging an improper application of their precious time, and exposing them to imminent danger of contamination. Gay and unthinking youth are powerfully influenced by the force of popular opinion, and readily adopt those habits which are sanctioned by the example and approbation of what is termed the polite world. Captivated by the allurements which this practice presents, they are easily enticed into the society of artful persons, who too often seduce them from the paths of rectitude, and lay the foundation for bitter remorse during the remainder of life. Were dancing abstracted from the company and festivities which usually attend it, most persons would consider it rather as a laborious and unpleasant exercise, than an agreeable amusement; the very circumstances which recommend it to the idle and dissipated, render it wholly improper for a christian; who has the utmost need to cultivate seriousness and gravity, and to live and act as a pilgrim and a stranger. Though private balls and parties, may not be as openly indecent, and as demoralizing in their effects as those which are public; yet when a fondness for entertainments of this kind is once excited in youthful minds it is impossible to predict to what lengths it will carry them. Temptation succeeds temptation—vice is presented under more insidious and alluring forms—desires of pleasure become more and more vehement, and foster the growth of disorderly passions—and when their danger is so apparent as to excite alarm, parental authority may be too feeble to restrain their inclinations. If we take a view of the interior of a public ball room or of a theatre, where dancing forms a prominent part of the exhibition—if we examine into the characters of those who fill them—listen to the conversation which passes amongst the spectators—notice the indecent apparel and gestures of the dancers, and the giddy levity which prevails throughout the whole assembly, we might easily imagine that licentiousness had chosen these for her favourite dwelling places, and decked them with all the allurements which excite lasciviousness or inflame

the passions. Characters the most immodest mingle unreservedly with the chaste and the virtuous—the human form is veiled in a garb so light and transparent, as to shock the feelings of decency; whilst the most indelicate allusions and actions, conspire to weaken the restraints of propriety, and pave the way to the commission of acts, which blast the reputation, and too often terminate in irreclaimable abandonment. How many rash and unhappy marriages, have taken their rise in the momentary excitement and ardour produced in the ball room, and how often have shame and ruin been introduced into the habitations of peace, by permitting a beloved daughter to display herself at a dancing party or a concert.

In vain is it alleged that those who addict themselves to these amusements have but a transient intercourse with vicious characters; the demoralizing effects of even a temporary association with evil, are too frequently, and too forcibly demonstrated, to admit a doubt of its baneful influence. From all this the conclusion is irresistible, that there is scarcely any thing in which we conform more fully to the spirit and manners of a corrupt and sinful world than by joining in the amusements of the ball room or the gayeties of the dancing party. Nor is it a small objection to these amusements, that they are usually enjoyed at those midnight hours, which nature and religion direct to be otherwise employed: and in how many unhappy cases has the sudden transition from a heated room to the cold air, after the exercise of dancing, proved the occasion of disease and death! These considerations imperiously demand that all those who are solicitous for the real welfare and happiness of their tender offspring, should restrain them from this fertile source of contamination. Let them solemnly query whether in teaching them to dance—in taking them to private concerts, or to those public entertainments, where for a small pecuniary consideration, the vilest characters may gain admittance, they are “training them up in the way they should go”—encouraging them to “live in the fear and admonition of the Lord,” and “keeping them unspotted from the world;” or whether they are not rather chargeable with the moral and religious declension which frequently ensues.

We shall close our remarks on this subject with a few selections from the memoirs of Caroline E. Smelt. This excellent young woman, who evinced in very early life, a strong objection to dancing, retained to its close, an abhorrence of balls, dancing parties, theatres, and other vain amusements; and a short time previous to her death, very forcibly observed to some friends—“Let no person endowed with rational powers call them innocent or harmless. How can that be innocent

which leads to a prodigal waste of precious time? How can that thing be called harmless which leads to an unnecessary exposure of health? How can that amusement be innocent which has not the glory of God for its object? How can that amusement be harmless which has a direct tendency to unfit the mind for devotional exercises? We are such frail creatures that we constantly require some excitement to lead us to God, and not to estrange us from him. Will any venture to say that they have been brought to love the Lord Jesus better by having attended a theatre or a ball room? I presume not. I can say, from my own experience, that I never derived solid improvement or real pleasure from either. From neither of them have I ever derived any thing which could afford my mind the least satisfaction in hours devoted to self-examination, nor any thing to strengthen the soul against the terrors of death and judgment. I consider them worse than vanity—they are exceedingly sinful.”

Just before the close of life she showed particular solicitude for the welfare of a beloved cousin, who was absent; and left a message for her, from which the following is extracted :

“Tell her that I desire her never again to participate in sinful amusements. She loves me, and will, I hope, value what I say. Tell her I requested, on my death-bed, that she might never enter a theatre, a ball room, or attend another fashionable tea-party, as they are called. They are all of the same family, let who will say otherwise. If one of them be sinful, they are all so; and on that subject I have no doubt. I generally attended with reluctance; and nothing but a desire to conform to the customs of the society in which I moved ever induced me to go. Silly excuse! for my better judgment told me better things.”

Oratorios are in some measure connected with the subject before us, and by many they are esteemed more justifiable than any of the amusements previously noticed. As the words of Holy Scripture or Scripture history, are generally used, some persons are allured to them who would not visit ordinary entertainments. But when we consider of what they are composed, and seriously reflect upon their tendency, we must conclude that oratorios are liable to strong objections. The mission and ministration of our blessed Saviour are made the basis of the performances—are set to music, and rendered mere vehicles of idle diversion, often too, by persons of the most depraved characters. Is not this a profanation of sacred things? Is it not ridiculing the offers of salvation, and trifling with the messages of redeeming love? The sublime doctrines of the gospel were never designed for

playhouse entertainments—it is, we fear, in a very awful sense, taking the name of the Lord in vain.

To conclude.—Time is short and precious; we have no leisure for these vain amusements; and indeed we need them not. The gospel opens a source of purer, sweeter and more substantial pleasures: we are invited to communion with God; we are called to share in the theme of angels; the songs of heaven, and the wonders of redeeming love are laid open to our view. The Lord himself is waiting to be gracious, waiting with promises and pardons in his hand. Well then may we bid adieu to the perishing pleasures of sin; well may we pity those who can find pleasure in those places and parties, where he is shut out; where his holy name is only mentioned to be blasphemed; where his commandments are not only broken, but insulted; where if sinners proclaim not their shame as in Sodom, wickedness at least is wrapt up in a disguise of delicacy only to make it more insinuating.